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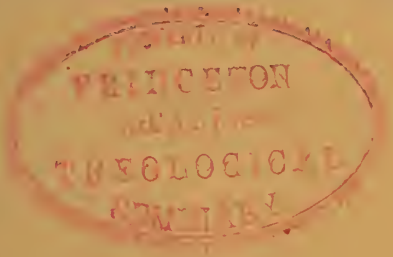
MR. JUDSON'S LETTER.

TO THE

FEMALE MEMBERS

Of Christian Churches in the United States of America.



PHILADELPHIA:

1832.

MR. JUDSON'S LETTER.

To the Female Members of Christian Churches in the United States of America.

Dear Sisters in Christ,—Excuse my publicly addressing you. The necessity of the case is my only apology. Whether you will consider it a sufficient apology for the sentiments of this letter, unfashionable, I confess, and perhaps unpalatable, I know not. We are sometimes obliged to encounter the hazard of offending those, whom of all others we desire to please. Let me throw myself at once on your mercy, dear sisters, allied by national consanguinity, professors of the same holy religion, fellow pilgrims to the same happy world. Pleading these endearing ties, let me beg you to regard me as a brother, and to listen with candor and forbearance to my honest tale.

In raising up a Church of Christ in this heathen land, and in laboring to elevate the minds of the female converts to the standard of the gospel, we have always found one chief obstacle in that principle of vanity, that love of dress and display (I beg you will bear with me,) which has, in every age and in all countries, been a ruling passion of the fair sex, as the love of riches, power and fame, has characterized the other. That obstacle lately became more formidable, through the admission of two or three fashionable females into the church, and the arrival of several Missionary sisters, dressed and adorned in that manner, which is too prevalent in our beloved native land.—On my meeting the church, after a year's absence, I beheld an appalling profusion of ornaments, and saw that the demon of vanity was laying waste the female department. At that time I had not maturely considered the subject, and did not feel sure what ground I ought to take. I apprehended also, that I should be unsupported and perhaps opposed by some of my coadjutors. I confined my efforts, therefore, to private exhortation, and with but little effect. Some of the ladies, out of regard to their pastor's feelings, took off their necklaces and ear-ornaments, before they entered the chapel, tied them up in a corner of their handkerchiefs, and on returning, as soon as they were out of sight of the Mission house, stopped in the middle of the street to array themselves anew.

In the mean time, I was called to visit the Karens, a wild people, several days journey to the north of Maulmein. Little did I expect there to encounter the same

enemy, in those "wilds, horrid and dark with o'ershadowing trees." But I found that he had been there before me, and reigned with a peculair sway, from time immemorial. On one Karen woman, I counted between twelve and fifteen necklaces of all colours, sizes and materials. Three was the average. Brass belts above the ancles, neat braids of black hair tied below the knees, rings of all sorts on the fingers, bracelets on the wrists and arms, long instruments of some metal, perforating the lower part of the ear, by an immense aperture, and reaching nearly to the shoulders, fancifully constructed bags, inclosing the hair, and suspended from the back part of the head, not to speak of the ornamental parts of their clothing, constituted the fashions and the ton of the fair Karenesses. The dress of the female converts was not essentially different from that of their countrywomen. I saw that I was brought into a situation that precluded all retreat,—that I must fight or die.

For a few nights I spent some sleepless hours, distressed by this and other subjects, which will always press upon the heart of a Missionary, in a new place. I considered the spirit of the religion of Jesus Christ. I opened to 1 Tim. ii. 9, and read those words of the inspired apostle; "I will also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, *not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.*" I asked myself, Can I baptize a Karen woman in her present attire? No. Can I administer the Lord's Supper to one of the baptized in that attire? No. Can I refrain from enforcing the prohibition of the apostle? Not without betraying the trust I have received from him. Again, I considered, that the question concerned not the Karens only, but the whole Christian world; that its decision would involve a train of unknown consequences, that a single step would lead me into a long and perilous way. I considered Maulmein and the other stations; I considered the state of the public mind at home. But "*what is that to thee? follow thou me,*" was the continual response, and weighed more than all. I renewedly offered myself to Christ, and prayed for strength to go forward in the path of duty, come life or death, come praise or reproach, supported or deserted, successful or defeated in the ultimate issue.

Soon after coming to this conclusion, a Karen woman offered herself for baptism. After the usual examination, I inquired whether she could give up her ornaments

for Christ? It was an unexpected blow! I explained the spirit of the gospel. I appealed to her own consciousness of vanity. I read her the apostle's prohibition. She looked again and again at her handsome necklace (she wore but one,) and then with an air of modest decision, that would adorn, beyond all outward ornaments, any of my sisters whom I have the honor of addressing, she took it off, saying, *I love Christ more than this.* The news began to spread. The Christian women made but little hesitation. A few others opposed, but the work went on.

At length, the evil which I most dreaded came upon me. Some of the Karen men had been to Maulmein, and seen what I wished they had not.—And one day, when we were discussing the subject of ornaments, one of the Christians came forward in my face, and declared that at Maulmein, he had actually seen one of the great female teachers wearing a string of gold beads around her neck! ! !

Lay down this paper, dear sisters, and sympathize a moment with your fallen Missionary. Was it not a hard case? Was it not cruel for that sister, thus to smite down to the dust her poor brother, who, without that blow, was hardly able to keep his ground? But she knew it not. She was not aware of the mischief she was doing. However, though cast down, I was not destroyed; though sorely bruised and wounded, I endeavoured to maintain the warfare as well as I could;—after some conflict, the enemy fled the field, and when I left those parts, the female converts were, generally speaking, arrayed in modest apparel.

On arriving at Maulmein, and partially recovering from a fever which I had contracted in the Karen woods, the first thing I did, was to crawl out to the house of the patroness of the gold beads. To her I related my adventures,—to her commiseration I commended my grief. With what ease and truth too, could that sister reply, Notwithstanding these beads, I dress more plain than most ministers' wives and professors of religion, in in our native land. These beads are the only ornament I wear; they were given me when quite a child, by a dear mother, whom I never expect to see again (another hard case;) and she enjoined it on me never to part with them, as long as I lived, but to wear them as a memorial of her! O ye Christian mothers, what a lesson you have before you. Can you, dare you give injunctions to your daughters, directly contrary to apostolic commands?

But to the honor of my sister, be it recorded, that as soon as she understood the merits of the case, and the mischief done by such example, off went the gold beads, and she gave decisive proof, that she loved Christ more than father or mother. Her example, united with the efforts of the rest of us at this station, is beginning to exercise a redeeming influence in the female department of the church.

But notwithstanding these favourable signs, nothing, really nothing is yet done. And why? This Mission and all others must necessarily be sustained by continual supplies of Missionaries, male and female, from the mother country. Your sisters and daughters will continually come out, to take the place of those who are removed by death, and to occupy numberless stations, still unoccupied. And when they arrive, they will be dressed in their usual way, as Christian women at home are dressed. And the female converts will run around them, and gaze upon them, with the most prying curiosity, regarding them as the freshest representations of the Christian religion, from that land where it flourishes in all its purity and glory. And when they see the gold and jewels pendent from their ears, the beads and chains encircling their necks, the finger rings set with diamonds and rubies, the rich variety of ornamental head-dress; "the mantles and the wimples and the crisping pins" (see the rest in Isaiah 3d chap.,) they will cast a bitter, reproachful, triumphant glance at their old teachers, and spring with fresh avidity, to re-purchase and resume their long neglected elegancies;—the cheering news will fly up the Dah-gyaing, the Laing-bwai and the Sal-wen;—the Karenesses will reload their necks and ears, and arms, and ancles;—and when after another year's absence I return and take my seat before the Burmese or the Karen church, I shall behold the demon of vanity, enthroned in the centre of the assembly, more firmly than ever, grinning defiance to the prohibitions of apostles, and the exhortations of us who would fain be their humble followers. And thus you, my dear sisters, sitting quietly by your fire-sides, or repairing devoutly to your places of worship, do, by your example, spread the poison of vanity, through all the rivers, and mountains, and wilds of this far distant land; and while you are sincerely and fervently praying for the upbuilding of the Redeemer's kingdom, are inadvertently building up that of the devil. If on the other hand, you divest yourselves of all meretricious ornaments, your sisters and

daughters, who come hither, will be divested of course; —the further supplies of vanity and pride will be cut off, and the churches at home being kept pure, the churches here will be pure also.

Dear Sisters,—Having finished my tale, and therein exhibited the necessity under which I lay of addressing you, I beg leave to submit a few topics to your candid and prayerful consideration.

1. Let me appeal to conscience, and inquire, what is the real motive for wearing ornamental and costly apparel? Is it not the desire of setting off one's person to the best advantage, and of exciting the love and admiration of others? Is not such dress calculated to gratify self-love, to cherish the sentiments of vanity and pride? And is it not the nature of those sentiments to acquire strength from indulgence? Do such motives and sentiments comport with the meek, humble, self-denying religion of Jesus Christ? I would here respectfully suggest, that these questions will not be answered so faithfully in the midst of company, as when quite alone kneeling before God.

2. Consider the words of the apostle, quoted above from 1 Tim. ii. 9:—"I will also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness, and sobriety, *not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.*" I do not quote a similar command recorded in 1 Peter, iii. 3, because the verbal construction is not quite so definite, though the import of the two passages is the same. But cannot the force of these passages be evaded? Yes, and nearly every command in Scripture can be evaded, and every doctrinal assertion perverted, plausibly and handsomely, if we set about it in good earnest. But preserving the posture above alluded to, with the inspired volume spread open at the passage in question, ask your hearts in simplicity and godly sincerity, whether the meaning is not just as plain, as the sun at noon-day. Shall we then bow to the authority of an inspired apostle, or shall we not? From that authority, shall we appeal to the prevailing usages and fashions of the age? If so, please to recall the Missionaries you have sent to the heathen; for the heathen can vindicate all their superstitions on the same ground.

3. In the posture you have assumed, look up and behold the eye of your benignant Saviour ever gazing upon you, with the tenderest love,—upon you, his daughters, his spouse, wishing above all things that you would

yield your hearts entirely to him, and become holy as he is holy, rejoicing when he sees one and another accepting his pressing invitation, and entering the more perfect way; for, on that account, he will be able to draw such precious souls into a nearer union with himself, and place them at last in the higher spheres, where they will receive and reflect more copious communications of light, from the great fountain of light, the uncreated Sun.

4. Anticipate the happy moment, hastening on all the wings of time, when your joyful spirits will be welcomed into the assembly of the spirits of the just made perfect. You appear before the throne of Jehovah;—the approving smile of Jesus fixes your everlasting happy destiny; and you are plunging into "the sea of life and love unknown, without a bottom or a shore." Stop a moment;—look back on yonder dark and miserable world that you have left; fix your eye on the meagre, vain, contemptible articles of ornamental dress, which you once hesitated to give up for Christ, the King of glory; and on that glance, decide the question, instantly and forever.

Surely you can hold out no longer. You cannot rise from your knees, in your present attire. Thanks be to God, I see you taking off your necklaces and ear-rings, tearing away your ribbons and ruffles and superfluities of headdress; and I hear you exclaim, What shall we do next? An important question deserving serious consideration. The ornaments you are removing, though useless and worse than useless, in their present state, can be so disposed of as to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, relieve the sick, enlighten the dark minded, disseminate the Holy Scriptures, spread the glorious Gospel throughout the world. Little do the inhabitants of a free Christian country know of the want and distress, endured by the greater part of the inhabitants of the earth.—Still less idea can they form of the awful darkness, which rests upon the great mass of mankind in regard to spiritual things. During the years that you have been wearing these useless ornaments, how many poor creatures have been pining in want! How many have languished and groaned on beds of abject wretchedness? How many children have been bred up in the blackest ignorance, hardened in all manner of iniquity? How many immortal souls have gone down to hell, with a lie in their right hand, having never heard of the true God and the only Saviour!—Some of these miseries might have been mitigated; some poor wretch have felt his pain relieved;

some widow's heart been made to sing for joy; some helpless orphan have been rescued from hardened depravity, and trained up for a happy life here and hereafter. Some, yea many precious souls might have been redeemed from the quenchless fires of hell, where now they must lie and suffer to all eternity, had you not been afraid of being thought unfashionable, and not "like other folks!" had you not preferred adorning your persons, and cherishing the sweet seductive feelings of vanity and pride!

O Christian sisters, believers in God, in Christ, in an eternal heaven and an eternal hell! and can you hesitate and ask what you shall do? Bedew those ornaments with the tears of contrition; consecrate them to the cause of charity;—hang them on the cross of your dying Lord. Delay not an instant. Hasten, with all your might, if not to make reparation for the past, at least to prevent a continuance of the evil in future. And be not content with individual exertion. Remember that union is strength. Take an example from the Temperance Societies, which are rising in their might, and rescuing a nation from the brink of destruction.

Unite, Christian sisters, *of all denominations*, and make an effort to rescue the Church of God, from the insidious attacks of an enemy, which is devouring her very vitals. As a counter part to the societies just mentioned, may I respectfully suggest that *Plain Dress Societies* be formed in every city and village throughout the land, recognizing two fundamental principles,—the one based on 1 Tim. 11: 9; *all ornaments and costly dress to be disused;* the other on the law of general benevolence,—*the avails of such articles, and the savings resulting from the Plain Dress system to be devoted to purposes of charity.* Some general rules in regard to dress, and some general objects of charity may be easily ascertained and settled. Minor points must of course, be left to the conscience of each individual. Yet free discussion will throw light on many points at first obscure. Be not deterred by the suggestion, that in such discussions, you are conversant about *small* things. Great things depend on small; and in that case, things which appear small to short sighted man, are great in the sight of God. Many there are, who praise the principle of self-denial in general, and condemn it in all its particular applications, as too minute, scrupulous, and severe. Satan is well aware that if he can secure the minute units, the sum total will be his own. Think not any thing small, which may have a

bearing upon the kingdom of Christ, and upon the destinies of eternity. How easy to conceive, from many known events, that the single fact of a lady's divesting herself of a necklace, for Christ's sake, may involve consequences, which shall be felt in the remotest parts of the earth, and in all future generations to the end of time; yea, stretch away into a boundless eternity, and be a subject of praise, millions of ages, after this world and all its ornaments are burnt up.

Beware of another suggestion made by weak and erring souls, who will tell you, that there is more danger of being proud of plain dress and other modes of self-denial, than of fashionable attire and self-indulgence. Be not ensnared by this last, most finished, most insidious device of the great enemy. Rather believe, that He who enables you to make a sacrifice, is able to keep you from being proud of it. Believe that he will kindly permit such occasions of mortification and shame, as will preserve you from the evil threatened. *The severest part of self-denial consists in encountering the disapprobation, the envy, the hatred of one's dearest friends.* All who enter the strait and narrow path in good earnest, soon find themselves in a climate extremely uncongenial to the growth of pride.

The gay and fashionable will, in many cases, be the last to engage in this holy undertaking. But let none be discouraged on that account. Christ has seldom honored the leaders of worldly fashion, by appointing them leaders in his cause. Fix it in your hearts, that in this warfare, *the Lord Jesus Christ expects every woman to do her duty!* There is probably not one in the humblest walks of life, but would, on strict examination, find some article, which *might* be dispensed with, for purposes of charity, and *ought* to be dispensed with, in compliance with the apostolic command. Wait not, therefore, for the fashionable to set an example; wait not for one another; listen not to the news from the next town; but *let every individual go forward,* regardless of reproach, fearless of consequences. The eye of Christ is upon you. Death is hastening to strip you of your ornaments, and to turn your fair forms into corruption and dust. Many of those for whom this letter is designed, will be laid in the grave, before it can ever reach their eyes. We shall all soon appear before the judgment seat of Christ, to be tried for our conduct, and to receive the things done in the body. When placed before that awful bar, in the presence of that Being, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and whose irrevocable fiat will fix you for ever in heaven or in hell, and mete out the measure of your everlasting pleasures and pains, what course will you then wish you had taken? Will you then wish, that in defiance of his authority, you had adorned your mortal bodies with gold and precious stones and costly attire, cherishing self-love, vanity and pride? Or will you wish, that you had chosen a life of self-denial, renounced the world, taken up the cross *daily* and followed him? *And as you will then wish you had done,* DO NOW. Dear Sisters, your affectionate brother in Christ,

Maulmien, Oct. 1831. A. JUDSON.